

A14 UPDATE

A speedy recovery service and a ban on drivers changing lanes on the approaches to junctions are being planned to relieve delays on the A14. The Highways Agency, which is responsible for the congestion-blighted trunk road, has been setting out how it might spend the £20 million which has been allocated for short-term improvements. The Girton and Spittals interchanges, at either end of the route between Cambridge and Huntingdon, will be upgraded to improve traffic flow in both directions. The agency says relieving pressure eastbound between Bar Hill and Girton is a priority. One possible innovation is the creation of hatched areas between lanes approaching the cloverleaf junction, known as a "tiger tail", which would stop drivers changing lane and separate traffic bound for Huntingdon Road from vehicles heading for the A14.

Another idea is confining eastbound traffic on the A428 to one lane at the Girton interchange, to allow traffic merging from the A14 to join freely, and an extra lane eastbound to the Histon interchange will be investigated. The agency is also planning a swift recovery service, dubbed "minute man", to help remove broken down vehicles quickly, and to install more messaging signs for drivers.

A spokeswoman said: "The Highways Agency is currently considering a number of options as part of the £20 million package to reduce congestion at key junctions, which in turn impact the whole section of the A14 from Cambridge to Huntingdon.

"The Government will improve the layout of two major junctions at the two ends of the Huntingdon to Cambridge section: the Girton and Spittals interchanges.

"We will also implement a number of measures that will reduce the impacts incidents have on the road, including provision of more helpful information via messaging signs to drivers when there is a problem."

Cambridgeshire County Council is the other organisation which is getting a share of the £20 million. As previously reported, it is considering doubling the size of the car park at St Ives park and ride because it is thought demand for the guided busway may outstrip the number of bays in the near future. The public's views on long-term improvements to the A14 are currently being sought ahead of the publication of a report in June.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO BID FOR GOVERNMENT CASH TO REPAIR DROUGHT DAMAGED ROADS

Local authorities across the East of England have joined forces to bid for government cash to help repair millions of pounds worth of damage to roads in the region caused by the ongoing drought conditions. Information from the Environment Agency indicates that the ten areas of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Suffolk and Peterborough, are considered to be suffering drought conditions which have caused extensive damage to roads in the affected areas.

Now a group of local authorities is about to make a joint bid to government for financial aid to meet the cost of repairing the roads and is trying to enlist local MPs to help lobby for central funding.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "The Environment Agency considers that an extensive area of the eastern region is still suffering drought conditions with low water levels. As a result of the drought the moisture content in the soil beneath the roads has fallen and the soil has shrunk causing serious damage to the roads - we have been trying to keep pace with the repair work, but now the extent of the damage means we need to look for assistance to meet the cost of carrying out the required extensive repairs which are well beyond the financial resources of individual local authorities in the region."

The consortium of local authorities has written to the Secretary of State for Transport, Justine Greening MP, inviting her to view the road damage in the region and 'requesting that the Government review their capital funding to be able to accept a formal bid for additional capital funding to enable damage caused by the drought to be rectified.' The bid for Government funding is expected to be submitted at the end of February.

The local authorities are still working on a comprehensive list of problem sites, but the number across the region grows continuously with an ever-rising bill for repairs which is already estimated to run into several millions of pounds. Local MPs have also been contacted and asked to lend their support for the bid for Government funding.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE TO TRANSFORM WAY SUBSIDISED TRAVEL DELIVERED

Council's Cabinet are being asked to consider plans to invest £1.5 million into providing targeted community and alternative transport solutions in place of bus subsidies. Cambridgeshire County Council has reviewed its previous decision to reduce subsidies to bus services, in order to save £2.7 million.

This included a thorough public consultation to assess the impact that this reduction may have and therefore help to mitigate the impact. This money is used to subsidise bus services that are currently not commercially viable.

Following an analysis of the survey results, members of the cabinet will be asked to consider bringing in phased reductions in bus subsidies over the next three years. A thorough assessment of local needs will be made first and alternative local transport measures identified wherever possible.

These proposed solutions would be developed as part of the forward looking Cambridgeshire Future Transport project that aims to develop more targeted, effective and locally needed transport provision. This could include community transport, sharing of transport services with other providers such as the health sector or working with bus operators to make existing subsidised services commercial. The Council will work closely with communities to bring in alternative transport measures to better suit local needs and save money at the same time.

Transport Minister Norman Baker has written to councils backing plans where authorities are using community transport in areas where commercial services are not viable. Some 81 per cent of respondents to the survey did not support the withdrawal of all bus subsidies as this would have an impact on elderly, women, people with disabilities and the young and this proposed approach will address these concerns. Nearly 68 per cent of respondents said they were likely or quite likely to use alternative travel links if they were available in their local area.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "It is clear that people value their subsidised bus services which is why we paid for them even though commercially they were not viable. But with the large savings we, like other authorities, have to make we have to look at whether these bus services can be better provided rather than using large vehicles to carry a relatively small amount of people. That is why we are considering investing £1.5 million into alternative transport solutions and phasing reductions over three years. If agreed we would work closely with communities to make sure alternatives are in place that are tailored for local needs.

The Government is encouraging councils to look at community transport solutions to meet the needs of residents where commercial services are not viable. These could be much more responsive for smaller cost. Operators are already talking to us about how changes can be made to make some services commercially viable and where there is no alternative we will consider keeping a subsidised bus.

BOOK YOUR PLACE AS ADVICE SERVICE HITS THE ROAD TO LIBRARIES

An information service which helps people stay safe, well and independent, is taking to the road to spread the word across Cambridgeshire with a series of events in Libraries. The Your Life, Your Choice service provides online information for people who need information or support to enable them to live an independent life. It also provides details of assistance for such things as social and health care and aids and home adaptations which make life easier for people in their own home.

The roadshows will visit libraries from the end of January, and will feature:

- * Leaflets and information about staying independent, safe and well
- * Information on aids and devices to help people remain independent
- * Trading Standards advice on how to Buy With Confidence and avoid rogue traders
- * Demonstrations of The Your Life, Your Choice online information service
- * Opportunities to book a session with the libraries' Computer Buddies to help less experienced computer users access online information.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "The Your Life, Your Choice website was developed with the support of service users, carers and our partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, to encourage people to think more widely than just traditional care services when planning the support they need.

"These roadshows, in addition to promoting Your Life, Your Choice, are focused on providing preventative and self-help information to people who may need it and telling them about the support and services available in their local community. Hopefully they will show people what is available and the difference it can make to them, their carers and families, whilst help them to stay safe and independent for as long as possible".

Roadshow schedule:

February 20-March 17 St Ives Library
April 16-May 12 Huntingdon Library
May 14-June 9 Cambourne Library
June 11-July 7 Central Library(Cambridge)
July 10-August 4 Ely Library
August 4-September 1 Chatteris Library
September 3-September 29 Wisbech Library
October 1-October 27 March Library
October 29-November 24 St Neots Library

Access to the Your Life, Your Choice website together with help to find the information you are looking for is already available in your local library or you can access information and advice directly at: www.yourlifeyourchoice.org.uk

CELEBRATIONS COULD BE RIGHT UP YOUR STREET - FREE!

Party people who are looking to organise a street celebration to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee or the greatest sporting show on earth can do so without paying a penny to Cambridgeshire County Council! After the success of street parties to celebrate the royal wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton last year, Cambridgeshire County Council is encouraging residents to start planning celebrations for the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The County Council has made the road closure application process easier for anyone who wants to get their community together for a street party - and for small community events the council will charge nothing for road closures on a cul-de-sac or residential roads without significant through traffic.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "We waived the road closure fee for the royal wedding and the Cambridgeshire community celebrated in style with 44 street parties in the county. I am sure that local people will want to mark such momentous occasions as the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics and Paralympics, which form the greatest sporting event in the world, and again the county council will help them do just that."

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YOUNG PEOPLE GO FOR GOLD

Young people from across Cambridgeshire gathered for a special ceremony in Huntingdon to mark their achievement in gaining Duke of Edinburgh Gold awards.

Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire Hugh Duberly presented the 33 youngsters with letters of commendation at the ceremony, which was held at Hinchingsbrooke School's Performing Arts Centre.

Award achievers, parents, leaders and guests attended the presentation, which was organised by Cambridgeshire County Council and supported by Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Huntingdon District Council.

Some of the recipients gave speeches about their experiences, which highlighted the breadth and variety of the activities they had enjoyed to attain their awards. Participants at the presentation had taken part in activities in the UK, Borneo, Cambodia, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy and Turkey. Challenge and adventure were common themes in the young people's achievements and one disabled participant had even been abseiling in a wheelchair.

To achieve their Gold award each of the participants had to take part in a physical activity, pursue a personal interest, spend 12 months giving voluntary service, complete a 4-day expedition and join a residential experience. Individual recipients took between 2 and 7 years to complete all sections of their awards. The final stage will be to receive their Gold certificates at a Royal presentation in St James's Palace in London.

GO-AHEAD GIVEN FOR NEW CAMBOURNE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Planning permission has been granted for a new 750-place secondary school to serve the village of Cambourne. The need for a secondary school has arisen as a result of the growth of Cambourne. Secondary school aged children living in the village currently go to Comberton Village College - the catchment area school.

Some pupils, in certain year groups, have been offered places at Chesterton Community College or other nearby schools when Comberton Village College has been full. Comberton Village College has already indicated that it will have insufficient places to meet the demand from its catchment area from 2013 - hence the need for a new school.

The school - which will accommodate 750 pupils and 100 staff when fully occupied - will be built on the western side of Cambourne, adjacent to Lower Cambourne and the Business Park. It will be close to the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council. The two-storey building will feature a central corridor, with a sports hall, a dining hall and classrooms running off either side. Access for vehicles will be from Sheepfold Lane, but Cambridgeshire County Council - who submitted the application - hope the majority of pupils will walk and cycle, since the school's catchment area will be limited to Cambourne itself.

Cllr David Harty, Cabinet Member for Learning said: "I am delighted that the go-ahead has been given for this school. Cambourne has expanded and has more houses than originally planned, and I am impressed that officers have identified the need for secondary school places, anticipated the challenges and found a sustainable solution. I look forward to welcoming the first pupils in September 2013."

OTHER NEWS

The January edition of library eNewsletter is now out.

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs011/1102102907030/archive/1102243387468.html>

Highlights include, National Libraries Day, Your Life Your Choice Roadshows
World Book Night Celebrations 2012.

The County Cabinet next meets on 31 January.

The Cabinet agenda is available on. <http://tinyurl.com/ccc-cab-310112>>

Cambridgeshire to transform way subsidised bus travel is to be delivered.

The Cabinet to consider proposals to invest £1.5 million in targeted local transport.

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/CMSWebsite/Apps/News/Details.aspx?ref=431>

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POLICE AUTHORITY (PA) UPDATE REPORT - JANUARY 2012

Committee recommends 2.95 per cent council tax increase

Members of Cambridgeshire Police Authority's Finance and Resources Committee voted in favour of recommending a 2.95 per cent increase in the policing part of council tax (precept). The final decision will be taken by the full Police Authority on February 9.

If approved, the increase amounts to ten pence per week for a Band D household. The recommendation comes after weeks of engagement with the public and discussion with the constabulary over whether or not to accept a one off grant offered by the government to freeze council tax at the current level. But the authority explains: "This offer is not quite as good as it first seems. It's for one year only which would leave us in a worse situation in coming years, leaving the new Police & Crime Commissioner with a decision over whether to make further cuts of £1.5m (equivalent to 37 constables) or increase council tax significantly from April 2013 to preserve current levels."

The committee heard that there was "no groundswell of adverse public reaction to potentially raising precept by up to three per cent to preserve levels of service, once people heard the context of the dilemma", despite reaching thousands of people with the message.

If the full authority accepts the recommendation to increase the precept it will cost around £5 per year for a Band D household.

Notes

In autumn 2010 the government announced massive reductions in public spending for the four year period 2011-12 to 2014-15. In December 2010 the government announced how much grant it would give to the Police Authority in 2011-12 and 2012-13. Over the two years Cambridgeshire will get about £11m less than previously (5% to 6% less per annum). In the following two years (2013-14 and 2014-15) we expect the reductions to be slightly less severe.

The Authority's net spending this year (2011-12) is £130m. Of this, £47m (36 per cent) is financed by local council tax payers and the balance of £83m (64 per cent) by government grant. The policing element of the current Band D council tax is £169.56 per annum (£3.26 per week). Most households in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are below Band D. Cambridgeshire Constabulary has already identified £11m of the £17m currently estimated to be required over four years. A one per cent increase in the council tax is three pence per week.

NEW POLICE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council are working to establish a shadow Police and Crime Panel for after their local elections in May 2012. Regular updates are also being provided to the six community safety partnerships and a stakeholder workshop is taking place on 3rd February. Contributions are expected from partners, including the Leader of the County Council. The Home Office is also undertaking regional events. One for the Eastern Region is planned for 22nd February.

Councillors can help ensure that local residents are aware of the election for the Police and Crime Commissioner (P&CC) on 15th November given the low awareness at present. Reference to the P&CC is made at all the Neighbourhood Forums by the PA member attending.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The PA is still in discussion with the force and partners regarding the council tax freeze grant and its implications for future revenue budget. Members have discussed whether the 2012/13 council tax freeze grant offered by the government should be accepted. The consensus indicates that the Authority should turn down the grant offer and the options have been prepared on this basis. The PA, like the County Council members, do not understand the logic of a low cap for a 13/14 increase in precept prompting a referendum if no increase is set for 12/13. An engagement programme is underway to increase public awareness of the dilemma and encourage feedback. The PA will set the budget on 9th February.

OPERATION REDESIGN

Operation Redesign continues to move forward with its target saving of £4.7m by March 2012. It is still expected to deliver on these savings. Basic Crime Units have now been replaced by policing areas based on district boundaries. Importantly there have been no reductions in front line uniformed police officers.

COLLABORATION

The three organisations' Police Authorities have given the go-ahead for joint Armed Policing, Major Crime and Scientific Services Units to be established during the early part of this year and implementation processes are well under way for those functions. By 2015, it is anticipated that a wide range of further joint operational functions and support services will have been established, saving around £20m per year and bringing economies of scale and increased resilience.

TASER

At the Finance and Resources (F&R) Committee on January 18 members discussed plans by the force to extend the use of tasers. The constabulary is planning to train up to 120 officers, in addition to already firearms trained officers, to use the less lethal devices which are designed to incapacitate through an electrical current.

CALL HANDLING

Call handling was on the Scrutiny Committee agenda again recently. The number of call handlers was cut in the recent restructuring which did have an effect on performance. However we are committed to improving our non-emergency call handling service and are reviewing the number of handlers we have in place to accurately meet the demand. Changes were immediately put in place and the situation has improved. The situation is being monitored by the PA and force improvement plans include a communication strategy to reassure the public on call handling to ensure crimes are not under reported.

PERFORMANCE

The Constabulary recorded 9.7% fewer offences in October 2011 compared to October 2010 (from 5043 to 4553), 7.7% fewer offences were recorded in the 12 months to the end of October compared with March 2011. The Constabulary are comparable to peers and on track to exceed the 10% reduction target over three years. Further improvements show the Constabulary detection rate to be the highest on record at 31.9%. The monthly detection rate has been higher than the same period in the previous year for more than 13 months.

HELICOPTER

Plans for a National Police Air Service (NPAS) are advancing and while there are significant details still to be resolved, the project has the backing of the Home Office and NPAS will come into existence as a legal entity in April 2012. The NPAS model has always identified that the Cambridgeshire force air frame will become part of the national air fleet and will no longer be based in the county. It is not yet clear when these arrangements will take effect, but it is unlikely to be before September this year. The options for providing the most efficient and effective air support for the county in a transitional period are currently being developed. It is proposed the force's base at RAF Wyton will close on April 1, 2012. The Police Authority is required to agree any changes to the current air support services arrangements. Two papers have already been presented to the Police Authority in relation to the proposals being explored.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS

31st JANUARY 2012